

What are the 2022 drought conditions for eastern Washington?

A cool and wet spring brought relief to much of Washington following the drought of 2021, but in a few parts of eastern Washington, the drought's effects have lingered. Those continuing concerns led the Washington Department of Ecology to issue an amended drought declaration. Effective June 1, 2022, five watersheds spanning parts of **Spokane, Lincoln, Grant, Adams, Whitman, Stevens, Okanogan and Pend Oreille counties** remain in "drought emergency."

It is important to remember that water is a shared resource and many communities continue to be impacted by drought.

What does this mean for the summer?

We received a lower snowpack than we had hoped for, however, a cool spring and late season snow has prolonged supplies.

Even with the prolonged supplies, lower than average streamflows are predicted for the Spokane, Walla Walla, and lower Pend Oreille basins. Some of our smaller streams out in the Columbia Basin are nearly or already dry. We are also hearing from landowners that the water levels in their wells are unusually low. This may be because groundwater supplies were hit hard last summer with the high temperatures and may not have recovered over the winter.

What is Ecology's role?

During a drought declaration, we typically have several tools to mitigate hardships on people, agriculture, and the environment:

- Issuing temporary drought permits for alternate sources to water right holders unable to access fully their normal water supply source
- Permitting temporary water right transfers between willing parties
- Leasing water from willing water right holders to put into or to remain instream
- Offering grants to public entities for projects to mitigate the effects of drought



What does this mean for water users?

Washington water law is based on the prior appropriation doctrine — "first in time, first in right." This means the full measure of senior water rights take priority over any portion of water rights established later. This includes adopted instream flows, which are streamflow levels set in rule that are protected from further appropriation.

When water supplies are low, junior water uses may be curtailed to protect senior rights, including any senior instream flows that would be impaired by the use. There are some areas of the state where junior water uses receive curtailment orders nearly every year, but in low water years they may occur earlier than normal.

How are domestic wells impacted?

Domestic wells operating under the groundwater exemption may also be impacted by dry conditions. Low water levels can be caused by many things and Ecology is generally unable to regulate between exempt well users.

People experiencing well problems should monitor water levels, repair the water system and/or possibly deepen or drill a new well. This should be done before Ecology may be able to intervene. Licensed well drillers are in demand right now, which means you should reach out as soon as you think you have a problem.

What can I do to help?

Use water wisely. In some of our systems, the water you are using has a direct impact on streamflows and aquatic life. In cities, residential lawn watering is the biggest use of water in the summer months. Simple changes can help us stretch the water supplies we have, including watering lawns sparingly, watering in the early morning or planting drought-tolerant plants.

Where can I find help?

While Ecology is the state agency responsible for declaring drought, we're not the only agency involved in drought relief. Various state agencies share responsibility for helping people get through drought emergencies.

- For drinking water emergencies due to the drought, please contact the Washington Department of Health's Office of Drink Water Hotline at 1-877-481-4901.
- For fish health emergencies due to the drought, please contact the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Fish Program at 360-902-2700.
- For agricultural emergencies (potential for loss of life of agricultural animals or crops) due to the drought, please contact the Washington State Conservation Commission at 509-385-7509.

To report a complaint related to water use:

Online: ecology.wa.gov/Footer/Report-an-environmental-issue Email: eroertscoordinator@ecy.wa.gov Phone: 509-329-3400

Other questions related to water rights or curtailments:

Contact: Sheri McMicheal Email: Sheri.McMicheal@ecy.wa.gov Phone: 509-329-3541

ADA accommodation

To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6831 or email at ecyadacoordinator@ecy.wa.gov, or visit https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility.

For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.